



**File Code:** 1920  
**Date:** May 11, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

The Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests are preparing to modify their Forest Plan's monitoring programs to transition to the requirements of the *2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule* (the Rule) (36 CFR 219.12). We invite your comments.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires that an existing plan's monitoring program be made to conform to the requirements of the Rule. Both the **1986 Lolo National Forest Plan**, and the **1987 Bitterroot National Forest Plan** were originally prepared under the 1982 Planning Rule and therefore must be made compatible with the 2012 Rule.

To conform to the Rule, monitoring items found in both Forest Plans have been reviewed and adjusted to address information that is critical to inform resource management and remain within the financial and technical capabilities of the two Forests. The most notable changes that have been made include:

- Re-phrasing monitoring items as questions.
- Providing up-to-date indicators.
- Updating current sources of data.
- Modifying, combining, removing, and creating new monitoring items to better assess Forest Plan components (goals, objectives, desired conditions, standards).

This transition in monitoring should not be interpreted as a change to other parts of the existing plans. Both the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forest Plans will remain in effect until revised. Both Forests are proposing to revise their forest plans simultaneously given that the two forests share a common boundary and can use a joint team of specialists to complete both plans at the same time. Depending on the availability of funding, an Assessment is proposed for completion in 2017. After finalizing the Assessment, the revision process will begin in 2018. Revised plans are expected to be prepared by 2021. Monitoring programs for both Forests will be reviewed again as part of plan revision.

Monitoring and evaluation comprise the management control system for both the Lolo and Bitterroot Forest Plans (USDA 1986, 1987). As part of adaptive management<sup>1</sup>, monitoring helps

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<sup>1</sup> Adaptive management is a structured, cyclical process for planning and decision-making in the face of uncertainty and changing conditions with feedback from monitoring, which includes using the planning process to actively test assumptions, track relevant conditions over time, and measure management effectiveness. (FSH 1909.12).



to provide the Forest Service, the public, and other stakeholders with information on progress towards, and outcomes of, implementing the plans. Monitoring and evaluation include comparing actual results of land management to outcomes forecasted. When management activities cannot be conducted in accordance with the Plans, or results do not meet the desired conditions, then activities are redesigned, rescheduled or dropped. Forest Plan amendments or revisions may also be made to address the findings of monitoring.

Because a plan monitoring program is not a plan component<sup>2</sup>, it may be modified by an administrative change (see 36 CFR 219.7 (f) and 219.13 (c)). Therefore, this transition will not result in a decision and is not subject to NEPA. Your comment is being solicited because an administrative change to modify a plan monitoring program may be made only after public notice and an opportunity for public comment is provided (36 CFR 219.13 (c)). Your comments on these changes will be considered as part of an adaptive management approach to improve the plan monitoring program and inform future revision of the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forest plans.

We are offering the *Forest Plan Monitoring Program Transition* document for viewing on our website, rather than as a hard copy. To review changes to monitoring items on the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests you may go to either Forest's websites at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/lolo>

or

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot/>

On the left side of the screen click on **Land and Resource Management**, then click on **Planning**. Documents are located under the heading **2016 Forest Plan Monitoring Program Transition**.

Written comments on either Forest's proposed monitoring item changes may be mailed to the following addresses:

**Environmental Coordinator**  
**Lolo National Forest**  
**Building 24, Fort Missoula**  
**Missoula, MT 59804**

**Environmental Coordinator**  
**Bitterroot National Forest**  
**1801 North 1st**  
**Hamilton, MT 59840**

For the Lolo National Forest, electronic comments may be sent to:

[comments-northern-lolo@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-lolo@fs.fed.us)

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<sup>2</sup> Plan components include: desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, suitability of lands (36 CFR 219.7(e)). Plans may also include "goals" as an optional plan component. (36 CFR 219.7(e)).

For the Bitterroot National Forest, electronic comments may be sent to:

[comments-northern-bitterroot@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-bitterroot@fs.fed.us)

**Please reply by June 11, 2016.**

Please note that the Northern (R1) Regional Office is concurrently working on a broader-scale strategy to identify monitoring items that are best addressed at a geographical scale larger than a single National Forest or National Grassland. This broader scale strategy will be completed after this transition.

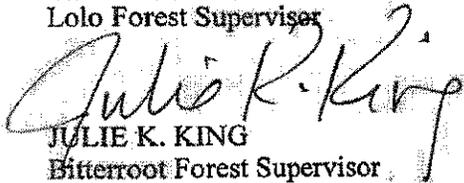
After reviewing and considering public comment, the final monitoring items for the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests will be posted on our websites as shown above. Forest plan monitoring will be reported biennially (every two years), starting from the date of the monitoring plan transition.

Thank you for participating with both the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests!

Sincerely,



TIMOTHY GARCIA  
Lolo Forest Supervisor



JULIE K. KING  
Bitterroot Forest Supervisor